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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers a common-sense approach to school public relations that stresses the involvement of everyone on the school team. The emphasis is on identifying simple, low-cost ways educators can communicate effectively with their many publics. The author briefly outlines the basic principles of organizational communication and public relations and suggests how these principles apply to public schools. Guidelines are presented to aid educators in preparing and using newsletters, dealing with the news media, and maintaining relations with different publics. (JG)

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ACSA OPERATIONS NOTEBOOK 5

An Organic Guide to

SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

By Lew Armistead
ACSA Public Information Executive

ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS NOV., 1977

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Introduction

An organic approach to school public relations? Why not?

Too many of us think that school public relations means creating multi-colored brochures that explain what we are doing with students, or getting television coverage of governing board meetings, or sending out fancy news releases proclaiming the wonders of our instructional activities. Sure, all of these can be very beneficial parts of school public relations. But this book deals with a more basic approach -- a grass roots approach, an organic approach. One that can be used by an educator or school district; one that operates on a daily basis.

The p.r. practices described above can do some good things for any school district. But they also require a good size bankbook and staff to carry out the tasks. If your district is wealthy enough and can afford it, fine. But if not, a less expensive approach is needed. A common sense approach to relating with people should be your public relations program.

Even educators in a district with a well-staffed public relations division, shouldn't close this book. If they are not conscious of their individual public relations responsibilities on a daily basis, all the good the public relations division is doing will be hampered. Everyone needs to understand the "organic approach" to school public relations, and that's what this is all about. You will read about some low-cost activities to employ right now. You will read how all members of the educational community can be part of the school p.r. program. You will read how p.r. fits into the instructional program.

ACSA POSITION STATEMENT ON SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Education is a three-way partnership among students, citizens, and educators. The effectiveness of public schools depends upon the supportive and effective relationships of this trio.

Since relationships are founded in personal attitudes, an essential element in their development and maintenance is effective communications between students, citizens, and school and district personnel.

As part of ACSA's continuing commitment to advance education in California, ACSA and its members shall endeavor to establish and maintain effective communications with education's various publics by:

* Promoting school public relations as a management function at both school and district level.

* Aggressively carrying out a public relations program on a consistent basis.

* Providing a variety of constructive ways in which people can become involved in their schools so they can express their interest in and concern for their schools and students.

* Anticipating the information needs of the public and providing the information in timely, understandable and appropriate ways.

* Facing controversial issues squarely and presenting the public with the information it needs to understand the problems and support corrective action.

Effective public relationships depend upon the efforts of many people -- school board members, superintendents, principals, district administrators, teachers, classified employees, parent groups, students, and others. But the guidance and professionalism of an administrator trained and skilled in public relations can significantly contribute to an effective communications program.

As an organization of educators, ACSA shares the responsibility for educational public relations. Effective public information can have an important impact on making state-wide policy, deciding funding priorities and formulating program guidelines responsive to public educational needs.

ACSA strongly urges school administrators to place a high priority on public relations in their school districts. ACSA views effective school public relations as a critical step toward gaining and/or maintaining public support.

Adopted by the Representative Assembly January 22, 1977

SO WHAT IS THIS SCHOOL P.R.?

Public relations is basically what people think about an institution. Public relations skills teach how to communicate with people so they will have a better understanding of that institution. That is very important to educators as we tackle revenue increase elections, closing or building schools, starting alternative programs such as the traditional or the open school concepts, facing union militancy, dealing with advisory committees, and getting people to help us. Perhaps we have made the admirable mistake of being concerned only with teaching students for too long. Yes, education is what we are all about. But today we live in a different society. A society which is greatly affected by mass communications that create images of just about everything. Is it still enough to just teach?

We are facing monumental problems. The legislature is calling upon us to work more with our communities. That requires community understanding and support. We have an extremely important job in education. It's a job we should be sharing with parents and our communities. The public has every reason to support us. But support will only come when the public understands that we are doing our best to provide top-notch educational opportunities for our students. That should be the goal of your public relations efforts -- bringing about a better understanding of education by communicating with your publics.

There's a couple of basics to this school public relations business. First, public relations is something that is with us all the time. Educators don't have the choice of whether they will communicate with their publics. They do communicate. Every time the youngster goes home and responds to that famous question, "What did you do in school today?" education's public relations program is working. Every time a high school student throws an ice cream wrapper on a neighbor's lawn, education's public relations program is working. Every time someone turns on the television and hears about busing riots on the East coast, education's public relations program is working. Those may not be positive aspects of a school's p.r. program, but they certainly are part of it. No educator really has the choice of having a public relations program. The only choice is whether that program will be a little more positive than negative. It can be positive. But that takes a commitment to making it positive.

The other basic tenet to a school public relations program is that it involves everyone. The school p.r. professional in the district office certainly is part of the communications program. But so are the district bus drivers. The superintendent carries a large share of the p.r. responsibilities. But so do the school secretaries. In order to have a good chance to develop a positive image of schools, everyone must understand his or her public relations responsibilities and understand how he or she can be more positive communicators.

The National School Public Relations Association defines school public relations as "a planned and systematic two-way process of communication between an educational organization and its internal and external publics. Its program serves to stimulate a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational public relations is a management function which interprets public attitudes, indentifies the policies and procedures of an individual organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to encourage public involvement and to earn public understanding and acceptance."

There are some good words in that definition: planned, systematic, two-way. Please remember them.

With that let's look at some ways to bring about a better understanding of schools.

A SLIGHT DISCLAIMER

I would like to be able to promise you that once you have whizzed through these pages you automatically would be a school p.r. expert. But the fact is that some of the ideas you read here may not be appropriate for your district. They all have worked some place, but they won't work every place. Only you can best judge the needs and resources in your district. Thus, this notebook does not come with a money back guarantee.

KEY POINTS

One thing that I can promise is that a plan is necessary for a successful public relations program. We have seen time and time again that constructive public relations is planned, while destructive public relations just happens. The board of education and management team need to determine who will be in charge of p.r., what written materials will be distributed and how frequently,

what the staff will be asked to do, how will training be provided to help staff become positive communicators, and how much financial support will be devoted to creating a better public understanding of schools.

It's very important that there is one person in charge of public relations in a district. That doesn't mean there must be a fulltime p.r. person in a district office when the superintendent is the entire management staff. But one person should carry this responsibility. When hiring someone especially for public relations, make sure that person has good writing skills. Then look for ways he or she can pick up ideas critical to school public relations.

Whoever is in charge of public relations should sit on the superintendent's cabinet. He or she can advise the board and the superintendent of the impact any decision being discussed will have on the public. Before starting an open concept program, ask your p.r. professional how to best communicate that concept to assure public understanding. The same is important if you close or build schools, make cuts because of budget limitations, or have revenue increase elections. People may not always approve of our decisions. But if they understand why educators do things, there's a greater chance for acceptance. Use your p.r. person as a sounding board. A good p.r. pro will have a "feel" for your community.

FIRST THING YOU CAN DO

The first thing any educator can do is be the best professional he or she possibly can. Please remember that public relations is not a way to cover up mistakes. Don't think that if you make a mistake on Monday, a good p.r. person can "fix it" by sending out a newsletter on Tuesday. You are dealing with your publics all the time. By dealing with them effectively, you will help create a positive image of yourself as an educator and your district. That's the organic approach.

A WORD ON WORDS

Some educators, when they pick up a pencil, feel that the opportunity has arrived to impress people with their vocabulary. All the years of going to school will pay off because they can now use those six-syllable words stored in the recesses of their minds. Wrong!

Remember that the process of communications involves two elements: a sender and a receiver. The sender decides what message he or she will attempt to deliver. But the receiver actually determines what is heard. Reception of the message will be affected by many things including the educational level of the receiver. So when writing for the general public, please place those six-syllable words to one side. The general public could care less about our "educationese." Let's not confuse them with terms picked up in all those ed classes.

Have you heard about the Houston high school principal who wrote a note to parents, reading:

> "Our school's crossgraded, multi-ethnic, individualized learning program is designed to enhance the concept of an open-ended learning program with emphasis on a continuum of multi-ethnic, academically enriched learning using the identified intellectually gifted child as the agent or director of his own learning. Major emphasis is on crossgraded, multi-ethnic learning with the main objective being to learn respect for the uniqueness of a person."

One parent was really "right on" in answering:

> "I have a college degree, speak two foreign languages and four Indian dialects, have been to a number of county fairs and three goat ropings, but I haven't the faintest idea as to what the hell you are talking about. Do you?

That principal was a poor judge of his audience. Perhaps his teachers or district office administrators MIGHT have understood his message. But it was bad wording for the general public. Be sure to evaluate the audience you are attempting to reach. Be clear, concise, to the point.

WHO DOES THIS P.R. THING?

We had indicated that everyone communicates, but surveys show that some people are more effective communicators than others. Remember that "effective" means that more people listen to them. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are more positive communicators.

Surveys say that students are our most effective communicators. That is especially so with parents. Now, students communicate in many ways -- by words and by actions. Think about how you can make your students more positive communicators. Here are a few ideas:

* What is the first question elementary students are asked when they come home? "What did you do in school today?" They often reply, "Recess," or "Nothing." Teachers could have students keep a daily journal. It doesn't have to be graded or made into a big assignment. Just have them write in their journal for the last five minutes of the school day, answering the question, "What did I learn today." Then the day's activities are fresh in their minds when they go home. (Other teachers have students answer that question orally before they go home. Everyone benefits from each other's answers that way.)

* One of the worst messages our older students deliver is their actions in the community near the school. If people think of students only in terms of discarded ice cream wrappers on their front lawn or racing automobile engines, their impression of our schools will not be good. Call upon the students to help in this through student advisory councils, or student newspapers. You won't be able to stop all wrapper throwers, but making a dent in it will be well worth your while.

* Meanwhile, develop some programs where students deliver positive messages to the community, i.e., painting windows for local merchants during the holiday season, singing at senior centers and community gatherings, working as tutors for younger children, helping in convalescent homes, etc., etc.

The second most effective communicators, according to surveys, are non-employees who spend considerable time at school -- your volunteers. That includes classroom aides, PTA presidents, and advisory council members. Then comes employees and finally the media, our newsletters, and district publications. The media ranks considerably higher among non-parents in many areas. And non-parents make up as much as 70 percent of the population in some communities. So don't forget newspapers, radio and even television.

But it's important to think how you can make volunteers and employees more positive communicators. That's the organic approach.

* Non-employees who spend some time at the school are very credible communicators. They are not part of the "establishment," and they all have their sphere of influence in the community. Be sure these people understand fully what is happening. If they don't, they are liable to give out misinformation. Make sure they receive the staff bulletin and are invited to some staff meetings; develop orientation and periodic informational meetings. Treat them well!

* Employees -- these people, especially those who live in your community, are message carriers. They are looked upon by their friends as "education experts" and asked many, many questions. In numerous districts we find that classified employees especially live within the school district. Do they fully understand what is happening in the school? Do you include your classified employees in your staff meetings? Or do you plan any activities to keep them informed, such as special meetings or newsletters?

There's one thing you can plan to do today that will make all of these individuals more positive communicators for you. Do you remember how good you feel when the superintendent or board president tells you what a great job you are doing? Everyone enjoys receiving "strokes." Happy students, happy employees

and happy aides are going to be much more positive communicators. So take time to say thanks. That's the organic approach.

* One principal takes the time to write a personal, hand-written thank-you note to each of the 300 volunteers at his school twice a year. Sure it takes time, but he feels it pays off in the long run. Those aides know their principal appreciates their work, and they feel better about working with him.

* A staff bulletin is a great way to give strokes. When a teacher or student does something special include it in your school newsletter. That way the student or teacher feels good, and the reader sees that outstanding achievements are occuring at the school. If the achievement is of great importance, mention it in the district newsletter.

* Happygrams aren't new. (See example in Practical Aids section pp. 38-39.) But they're a great way to give students strokes. You can find something good about each and every kid in your classroom. It doesn't have to be his spelling scores. It might be the way he cooperates. But give kids happygrams when they are deserved. The student feels great getting the happygram and very proud when he or she shows it off at home.

* Student of the Week Bulletin Boards. A Special Student of the Week Desk. There are many ways to make a student feel good about his or her accomplishments. Try some. Those are all part of your school public relations program.

Schools have always communicated with parents. There's nothing new about that. But how about a new approach? Too many times the only occasion parents hear from the school is when their kid messes up. Both students and parents would feel so much better if teachers and principals sometimes called on a positive note.

* If you are a principal, set an example. Start a program where you make five or 10 phone calls home each month of a positive nature about students. Then get your teachers to do the same. Sure it takes time. But it's a great way to make students and parents feel better about the school experience. That will pay off in the long run.

Remember everyone on the school team plays a role in your school public relations program. Do they all understand their responsibilities? Have you thought about these important individuals?

* Bus Drivers -- The first and last school person some students see each day.

* Custodians -- The only person a school visitor sees in the evening.

* Secretaries -- The person who provides the school's "first impression" to visitors. The community has more contact with the school secretary than with the principal.

* Cafeteria Workers -- They are replacing Mom's home cooking.

* Teachers -- They spend so much time with the students.

* Aides -- They are part of the community and have their particular sphere of influence.

THE AGED OLD COMMUNICATION DEVICES

There are a number of time-tested public relations channels, all of which have specific advantages. Included here is the professional media, staff bulletins, and district and school newsletters.

The Media

By all means develop some positive relationships with the professional media in your community. Don't neglect them, thinking that they will leave you alone. The first time you have an employee strike or a riot on your high school campus, the media will introduce themselves to you if you haven't introduced yourself to them. We have all read the "negative" stories. Our task is to inform the media of some of our positive accomplishments and encourage coverage of them. Let's work with the media in focusing coverage on what we are doing for students, not what we are doing to students.

In thinking of the media, don't think just of your local newspaper. Also remember radio and television stations that are heard in your area. The radio is one of the most used sources for entertainment and news. Just ask yourselves what you do while driving to work and from or to the store. Many of us use the radio for diversion from the traffic snarls.

Being licensed by the federal government, both radio and television must devote a certain amount of time to what we call public service announcements. These are short 10 to 30 second announcements that are of interest to the public. Education qualifies for these. Give your stations a call to see if you can work with them on public service announcements.

The radio will also use news items from the schools, if you take the time to phone the news director and discuss coverage. These can be prepared easily. All that's required is identifying a good classroom activity, getting three people involved in it near a telephone, and calling the news director at your radio station. He or she will ask questions and tape right over the phone. Next thing you know it will be on the air. Television will also be interested in curriculum ideas if they are interesting enough.

You can get the professional media to cover your school. But it won't happen until you pick up the phone and introduce yourself and your school.

One of the biggest problems is the kind of educational events covered by the media. Just ask yourself what type of school activities you have seen reported on television recently. Well, there's been employee strikes, burning buildings, integration hassles, vandalism, and so on. None of that really relates to what it should be all about -- teaching. Let's start focusing the media's attention on some of the top-notch instructional activities going on in the classrooms. It can be done. But you need to make it happen.

Why not sit down with your colleagues and develop a list of some of the unusual instructional programs you have -- ecology areas and outdoor learning, high school students working with elementary kids in cross-aged tutoring, elementary students reading stories to senior citizens. Anything that is new and unusual could appeal to your newspaper editor or radio reported. They may not use the first idea you provide; they may not even use the second or third. But keep trying to strike their fancy and, sooner or later, you'll succeed.

Don't shy away from sending out news releases. It's a cheap way to communicate since all it costs is paper and postage. And the media does reach the masses very quickly. For a quick course in writing a news release see "The Worlds Shortest Course in Educational Journalism." (See Practical Aids section pp. 35-37.)

Staff Bulletins

If a school district or a school is going to implement only one form of written communications, perhaps it should be a staff bulletin.

Remember how important employees are in public relations? Each and every one of your employees has friends, and they chat about school. How can they effectively communicate about the district if they aren't provided the answers to questions they are asked? When budget woes force you to eliminate a program, do you make sure employees know why that program was cut? A staff bulletin would be a good way to communicate the news. Then they will know the answers when people ask them the questions.

Staff bulletins are also a great way to say thanks. If someone has done an outstanding job, report it in your staff bulletin.

Typical stories for staff bulletin:

Awards students have won, honors staff members have received, reports from the payroll department, new ideas in someone's classroom, notes from the board of education meeting that directly affect employees, job openings, upcoming meetings, staff development notes, and much more.

* You may also want to distribute your staff bulletins to other people besides employees -- volunteers, PTA presidents, advisory council chairpersons, community leaders, the media.

School and District Newsletters for Parents and the Community

One of the most expensive and slowest ways to communicate is through district and school newsletters. But they have advantages! That is one communication vehicle where you are sure what you want to say actually will be said. Every word written will actually appear in print. That is not so with news releases, since your local editor may alter, cut, or throw away your release. It's also not the case with verbal communications when you transmit information to someone hoping he or she will carry that message further.

In developing a district newsletter think about delivering it to all residents of your community and not just to parents. That is going to cost more, but it may be worthwhile to cut down the number of issues you publish and send those to all residents. You can find mailing services listed in the yellow pages that will handle the task for you.

Another word about delivery. Once we are past the elementary level it's useless to ask students to deliver your newsletter to their parents. Your carefully prepared publication, the one you spent hours creating, is just as likely as not to wind up in the school garbage can. Once you have done the newsletter, it's well worth the expense to mail it home to parents of intermediate and high school students.

How Do You Get Some of This Done?

* If you cannot muster up the funds to hire a pro to write these releases, bulletins, and newsletters, don't give up. Investigate having a high school journalism class take some of the responsibility. It's practical experience for them. If that won't work in your district, see if you have a nearby community college journalism class that is looking for some practical experience. Or does one of your staff members like to write? Or do you have a parent at your school with a degree in journalism? There are ways; look around.

SOME NEW THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Here are some public relations ideas to consider that do not fit the traditional mold. Their strong point is that they are inexpensive in dollars, but they do require a time commitment. This commitment, however, can pay off in public support.

* Speakers Bureau: This is a very credible means of communicating because people can ask questions. Develop a list of potential speakers and topics. It might include central office and site administrators, board members, supportive employees, and yes, students, too. Next develop a list of organizations to which you can offer this service -- civic clubs, PTA's, advisory councils, senior citizen groups, women's clubs, youth sports clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. Your Chamber can give you the names of many of these civic groups. Send out a list of your speakers and topics and wait. But do this all the time -- not just the month before your revenue increase election. Run an announcement in the local newspaper and even more calls will come in.

  Coffee Klatches are one form of a speakers bureau that has worked well for many school administrators.

* Information Phone Line: The scourge of any communications program is the rumor mill. Rumors can destroy an effective communications system. So provide people with an opportunity to have their questions answered. Place a telephone on your public relations person's desk or the desk of some other knowledgeable person. If that person doesn't have the anwser, get the caller's name and number and return the call. Encourage people to call in and ask questions. Sure you'll get some cranks, but you'll also get many valid questions. Again, place an article in the newspaper or your newsletter to let folks know the service is available.

* Kids Stuff: Many local newspapers, especially the weeklies, would be happy to run a column of students' writing. This would include short stories, poems, etc. Talk to your local editor. Each school could have a week. People say students can't write. This is a great way to show them that our students can write.

* Column for the Educator: Weekly newspapers might be happy to provide occasional space for school administrators. But be sure to stay from educational jargon and deal with topics that will interest the general public.

* Classified Bulletin Board: Many people question the need for so many employees. This occurs because they don't understand the jobs being performed. Consider having a bulletin board display in your central office or school showing what classified employees do. Tell the story, one department at a time, through words and pictures.

* Pictures of students: Place some poster-size photographs of happy students in learning situations around your school. This creates a good feeling for visitors, shows that students are the central focus in the school, and does great things for the students' self-image. If you don't have a district photographer, see if there is a staff member or parent whose hobby is photography.

* Communications Committee: Every community has its opinion leaders. Invite some of these people to form a communications committee. (You may already have such a group, in which case devote time with it toward communications.) Meet with these people to discuss some of the major issues with which you are dealing. These people will carry your message into the community. And others will believe them. This committee can also let you know what the community wants to know about the schools.

* Mother Nature: There once was a high school dean of student's secretary who had a great deal of pride in her school. She felt people didn't hear enough about the positive things students and staff were doing. She took it upon herself to write a publication called Mother Nature. It included short articles about student awards, exciting learning situations, upcoming programs, and such. This secretary handled the writing, editing, putting together, and distribution. Originally it was planned as a one-time effort, but it was so popular it became a continuing activity. Mother Nature was distributed to staff, PTA, school advisory councils, local businesses, parents, etc. Do you have someone at your school who has this much pride in education? If so, encourage an activity like this.

HOW ABOUT THE CLASSROOM AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

It troubled me to once hear a respected superintendent question the need for public relations when "we should be spending more time with kids." If your p.r. program pays off, you will be gaining support for education in your community. In the long run that should mean better learning opportunities can be provided for the students.

But even above that, your public relations program can work hand in hand with many classroon activities. You can conduct the learning program while doing your p.r. thing at the same time. Remember we said that students were the number one source of information about schools. They communicate. The better the job you do with them, the more positive message they will communicate. Here are some thoughts on how a classroon can be your p.r. program:

* Daily Journals -- We had discussed how elementary teachers can have students keep a daily journal. That's where right before they go home each day, they write about what they learned. Hopefully, they will remember long enough to respond positively to the "What did you do in school today?" question. Not only is that a p.r. tool

but it's also a good language arts experience for students. They practice writing complete sentences, punctuation, and expressing themselves.

* Kids Stuff -- We talked about the newspaper column for kids writing. Again they get the writing experience, and are also involved in positive communications. Besides seeing their "stuff" in the newspaper it does wonders for self-image.

* Writing to Seniors -- When looking for writing experiences for your students, how about contacting the president of your local senior citizens organization and setting up a pen pal activity. The kids would be more enthused really writing to someone instead of copying letters from a book. And the senior citizens will see that students care about them and that they can write.

* Classroom Newspaper -- It's another language arts experience and also can introduce the newspaper as a reading source to students. When distributed to parents, the classroom newspaper can also communicate the positive academic achievements. Include stories on recent field trips, projects, honors and writing by the kids.

* Getting Involved in the Community -- There are a number of ways in which classes can become involved in community projects. And such involvement is a great way to communicate that students care about their community. Think about painting merchants windows during the Christmas season, performing for civic groups, cleaning up litter from a nearby creek (good) science-ecology lesson), displaying art projects in the community, etc. One school even volunteered to prepare a mosiac display at the firehouse. The kids showed off their skills, and the firefolk spent time explaining their profession to the students. A beneficial experience for all.

* Self-Image -- Many teachers are concerned about developing a youngsters positive self-image, and that fits right in with your p.r. task. Remember that kids are communicators. A student who feels badly about herself and her school experience is going to be a negative communicator. So encourage self-image activities such as Kid of the Week Bulletin Board, Happygrams, and Kid of the Week Desks.

Don't feel that you must choose between public relations and instruction. They can go hand in hand. That's the organic approach.

THERE'S A SPECIAL GROUP

When planning your public relations activities, it's important to recognize all the various publics in your community. We know that we deal with students, parents, staff, and taxpayers. But don't forget the specific publics such as private school parents, the business community, people supportive of "fundamental" education, senior citizens, etc. All of them have a different perspective and different information needs. Make sure you offer something for everyone, or at least a means for every group to become informed.

Let's think specifically about seniors for a moment. Many of us only communicate with our senior citizens at a special time of the year. That's when we have a bond or revenue increase election. When we do that they give us a fairly standard answer: NO. And why not? The only contact most of them have with our students is listening to cars race up and down their streets, or reading some negative coverage about schools in the media. If those citizens were supportive of schools, they could probably lend us a big hand. It's likely that seniors in your community have many skills -- such as photography, weaving, beekeeping, gardening, cooking -- that would make great mini-lessons in your classrooms. In some communities, seniors are likely to have knowledge about the local history. Wouldn't it be much more exciting to hear people tell us about local history than read it from a textbook? These seniors could help our instructional program if we could only get them into the classroom.

* First off, we need to acquaint them with the positive things students are doing. Some secondary districts have started Senior Citizen Passes. Seniors living within

the boundaries of the district can receive this pass free of charge and then attend at no cost drama, musical and athletic events at the school. You can set the ground rules for the passes. But it allows the seniors to witness first hand positive student accomplishments.

* Many elementary classrooms are involved in special projects such as the study of Japan in the fourth grade. Many teachers culminate that study with a gastronomical delight of food from the country. Why not invite an influential senior citizen to join the students for that. The senior would see first hand that learning is going on and would carry that message for you.

* Think of other ways to work with senior citizens: pen pals with seniors, singing at your community senior center, putting on plays for them.

* Once you have shown them that your school is doing great things for kids, invite them to become part of a volunteer program. Many seniors have time on their hands. They could teach these mini-lessons, help with grading papers, and much more. The best way to communicate that learning is happening at your school is to let people see it firsthand. They will then be your p.r. program for you. That's the organic approach.

WHAT ABOUT PROBLEMS?

What happens when you have a problem? Do you communicate that?

The 1976 Gallup Poll expressed an interesting thought. Americans indicated that the number one reason for the national decline of test scores is lack of parental interest and concern. That could tell us that citizens are willing to share the task of educating students. The real aim of school public relations is to develop support for the schools. That should include helping us solve our problems.

Yes, explain education's limitations and problems in your public relations program. Do it in an honest manner designed to stimulate the public to help us meet those challenges.

NEVER FORGET TO LISTEN

We have said that effective p.r. or communications is a two-way process. It isn't enough to tell people you're doing a great job; you must also react to their concerns. You must be open to suggestions. You must answer questions. You must get involved with people.

There's one aspect of the school business that makes listening especially important. None of us today have money or time that we can waste. So let's focus our p.r. efforts on areas that really need understanding. For instance, if everyone in your school understands and approves of your reading program, then you don't heed to spend the majority of your p.r. time explaining reading. But if they don't understand the science activities, you do need to communicate about those. Listening will tell you what your community needs to better understand. If you don't tackle those needs aggresively, you'll end up spending most of your time on the telephone answering complaints or rumors based on either misinformation or a lack of information.

* How do you listen? The best way is through surveying, but that doesn't mean you have to hire a professional pollster. One of the best ways to survey is ask your school secretary to log her phone calls by subject for one month. If there are two call about reading and 29 calls about sex ed, you have an idea what interests your community. Spend some time through newsletters or coffee klatches or at meetings explaining your sex education program. It can save you more phone calls in the future.

  Another way to survey is asking influential people in your community. Remember the communications committee we discussed earlier? Sure you can tell those people what you are doing. But also ask them what the community is most interested in hearing about from the schools. Or if you

have an information telephone line, log the calls by topic. Discover the interest areas of your community, then aggressively communicate about those topics -- through your newsletter, news releases, your speakers bureau, meetings, letters, etc., etc.

IT'S JUST COMMON SENSE

School public relations is really just common sense. It's asking ourselves how would we like to be treated by educators if we were on the other side of the fence. In fact, when thinking about p.r., I really like to think about r.p. That stands for "relating with your publics." Adopt that approach in your every day dealings with people and you will make great strides in a positive public relations program.

There's a couple of key areas in this common sense approach. One is the telephone. Have you ever tried calling your own school or your district office. Sometimes it's very informative. I, for one, hate sitting through three-hour training sessions on answering the telephone. But it's so, so important. The school secretary deals with more people on the phone than the principal ever sees. In that sense, the secretary is more critical to the school's public relations program than the principal. The telephone is the only way numerous people deal with the school. If they have bad experiences on the phone, they are going to have a negative opinion about your school.

There's the story about a person who moved to a new community and one of the first things he did was phone the school. The conversation went something like this:

Secretary: Good morning, this is Sunnyside School. May I help you? (At which point the caller was very impressed, and felt the secretary really did want to help.)
Caller: Well, I just moved here and would like to talk with the principal about the school.
Secretary: Mr. Smith is in a meeting right now, Sir, but if you will hold, I'll see if he can be interrupted. (Now the caller really knew the secretary wanted to help and felt rather positive about the school.

However, the secretary neglected to press the hold button on the phone, and the next thing the caller heard was excerpts from the principal's meeting.

"Bend over." Whap. "Yeow." "Bend over." Whap. "Yeow."

Now I'm sure that the principal doesn't spend all his time paddling students, but that was the first impression this new member of the community received about the school. That was part of the school's public relations program - an organic part.

Make sure that people answering the phone understand not only the necessary skills, but also realize their part in your p.r. program. Be sure that students know what they are doing before you put them on the switchboard. That can be great training for students, but it can also harm your image if they aren't prepared.

Remember when handling phone calls: People can hear you either as a Super Human Being or a Grumpy Grouch. That goes a long way in your public relations.

The same goes for greeting visitors. Do it quickly and courteously. Try to meet their needs. That's the organic approach.

Newsletters

All educators should be doing some communicating through writing. The most common example is the newsletter. Principals write school newsletters, superintendents write staff bulletins, assistant superintendents write curriculum newletters. These can be very effective communication tools.

Remember what we said about educational jargon. Your newsletters certainly are not the place to exercise your vocabulary. Your message is only effective if it is understood. Be brief. Write crisp sentences. Get right to the point.

Communicate frequently -- whenever you have something worthwhile to say. But don't waste your audience's time with stuff that isn't worth reading.

* It's very helpful to let someone else read and evaluate the important messages you write. Sometimes that person will see a connotation in your message that you didn't consider. Find a person familiar with the community you are addressing. This takes a little extra time, but is well worth it.

One school principal wrote a flyer encouraging involvement in PTA. He indicated that the school really valued parental involvement and that I should join because if I did my kid would receive one point in the classroom ice cream contest. THAT WAS THE END OF THE MESSAGE. I guess he felt that the only reason to join was for the contest. I can't believe he really meant to say that. I also think that if he had spent five minutes re-reading what was written, or, even better, let someone else read it, that would never had been said. Boy, I bet that extra five minutes would have saved the principal a lot of time on the phone.

In writing your newsletter it's imperative that you are honest. Don't say something if you really don't mean it. That's the easiest way to creating hard feelings and negative images. For example, one school newsletter announced that parents could request teachers for the upcoming year but only if they completed a certain form because there were so many assignments being made then. The forms would be available at parent conferences. That sounded reasonable and was a good idea. But when parent conference time arrived, the teacher didn't have the slightest idea what that form was. And when the parent went to the office, the secretary had the hardest time trying to remember if she ever typed those forms. That parent felt she was being given the run-around. Be honest with people. That's the organic approach.

WHAT ABOUT THE MEDIA

In the organic approach to public relations we have stressed the common sense, day-to-day operations, but the media still is important. These days people are greatly influenced by the mass media. Just think about how much time you spend reading newspapers or listening to television and radio. If you have a public information person in your district office, he or she can handle most of the media contacts. But superintendents, principals and teachers will still have contact with the media, so here are a few thoughts.

Please don't be afraid to deal with the media. They are real people just like you and I, and they can be a big help help to you. Certainly the media have a job to do. But if you remember a few guidelines, you can have a beneficial, happy relationship with the newspaper editors and reporters and the radio and television reporters you meet.

* Be honest. Don't think that you can fool the media. Don't think that you can cover up a mistake by talking around it or telling a half truth. Not only is it likely that a reporter will catch you, but you will destroy your credibility for years to come.

* Meet your reporters and editors if you don't already have a speaking relationship. Do you know who covers your district and school? You should. Pick up the phone some time and introduce yourself to the reporters and editors in your community. You might even develop a list of story ideas from your school or district. Some may appeal to them.

* Be cooperative. Try to understand the needs of the media. Find out when their deadlines are. Don't give a reporter a story two hours after her deadline and get mad when the story isn't used. Just like dealing with other people -- if you treat them reasonably, they'll treat you reasonably.

Here are eight other ideas developed by Fred Sherwyn, Livermore Valley Unified School District.

* Try to be open in answering press questions. The right of students and staff members to privacy is protected by law and by common courtesy. Most questions can be answered without problems. If the media is doing its job, it will tell a story it feels needs to be told whether you help or not. You have a responsibility to do all you can to see that it is told fully and correctly.

* Regularly and systematically offer news and feature story ideas to the press. Don't be discouraged because your first half dozen ideas are brushed off with no coverage or only a few lines. Keep trying. Not only is the law of averages on your side, but if you are alert you will be sharpening your skills in identifying what makes a good story.

* Spend as much time as necessary explaining an idea or program to get it understood. Most people who feel they are misquoted are really people who didn't make clear what they were trying to say.

* Keep your head about errors. If a story has an error, decide whether the error invalidates the main idea of the story. If it doesn't you would probably still want to let the reporter know about it so the mistakes won't reoccur on subsequent articles. But don't make a federal case out of it.

* Don't be afraid to be interviewed. A professional reporter will not knowingly and purposely misquote anyone. He may attempt to get your true feelings on a subject plainly on the line while you would prefer to have your opinions not too clear, but he's not going to say you said "red" when you said "green."

* Level with the reporter about your thoughts on the impact of facts. If a story will do undue harm to someone or some program tell the reporter. The reporter retains decision on how she handles the story, but it can't hurt her to know the possible consequences.

* If you don't know the answer, say so. If you know who does know, refer the reporter to the source. If you don't know and don't know who does, agree to try to find out and call back, and do it.

* Find out the reporter's time-deadline requirements and try to cooperate. You need not drop everything for the press. But perhaps you can spare 60 seconds before his deadline or assign someone else.

Negative Media

What about the reporter or editor who seems to have a grudge against you or your school. Well, you might not be able to do anything about it. On the other hand, why not sit down and talk with that individual? Tell him or her about what goes on in your school, discuss the importance of media coverage, clear up their concerns. A few hours just might explain and correct some misconception they had about your school and turn coverage around.

If that doesn't work, then work with the other media channels in your community and the other organic approaches to school p.r. If you have a grumpy newspaper editor, think about using the radio more. If the television stations could care less about you, look at your local weekly newspaper.

On and Off the Record

Some of us get very angry when we thought we were talking with a reporter "off the record" and suddently we are quoted in print. If you want to avoid that, make sure the reporter knows when you are talking off the record. Most ethical reporters will respect receiving background information as long as they understand it's off the record.

News Conferences

News conferences can be very effective, but don't over use them. A district which calls a new conference every other week will find that the only people attending them are the superintendent and her secretary.

Scoops

It's important that you treat all media representatives equally. Don't give a story to one and not everyone. Don't give a story earlier to one reporter than to the others. That will make enemies very quickly.

If a reporter calls you and initiates a story, don't call all the others with that scoop. Generally, a scoop remains that until you have received four inquiries about it. At that point you can assume it's general knowledge, and distribute your own news release on the topic.

Ideas for News Releases

Here are some topics which might excite the media in your community. Consider preparing news releases on them, or call the reporters and give them the idea. Especially look for unusual happenings in the classroom -- ecology programs, vocational ed on-the-job training activities, backpacking classes. The unusual will perk up the media's attention. Let's focus that attention on the classroom.

* Milestones (individual school or district anniversary).

* Length-of-service stories -- service anniversary of a teacher, janitor or parent-participant in school affairs.

* Ceremonies involving retiring personnel.

* New equipment and how it works.

* Advance on anticipated visits of distinguished guests.

* Follow-up on visit -- with photos.

* Visits by foreign groups, exchange students.

* Unusual correspondence with authorities and schools abroad, or out of the district.

* Promotions.

* New or expanded usage of teaching equipment.

* Data on usage of equipment -- total pupils, pupil hours and expansion as a result of summer month scheduling.

* Inflation's impact on district budget.

* How district copes with inflation while protecting educational quality.

* News release pegged on superintendent's newsletter, reporting to community what was published for staff.

* Board of Education meeting.

* News linking district with an event-in-the-news (such as school involvement in an environmental crisis).

* Student participation in "City Government Day," a visit to the Legislature or local office of an elected official.

* Courses added, and why.

* Enrollment data.

* Oldest student; youngest student.

* Noteworthy achievement on the part of an adult student.

* Book fair.

* Public library "story hour" for preschool and elementary ages.

* Radio program started or in progress.

* Senior citizen participation events.

* Back-to-school programs for mothers and fathers.

* Teacher and student art exhibits.

* Vocational education specials.

* Tutoring service.

* Teacher-administrator "switch day" -- with newest teacher acting as superintendent, superintendent teaching first grade, etc., and school board members filling any unusual role.

* Scholarship news.

* Home visit program.

* School rummage sale, flea market, carnival night.

* Teacher talent shows with heavy photo coverage.

* Color slide/sound presentation on life on one educator during a total school day with visitations to business and civic groups. Preview of this for the press.

* Little theatre production dramatizing history of area and its ecomony, people and schools.

* Identified "weeks" (such as "National Health," "Library," Safety," etc., or, mayor to proclaim a week of your own).

A VIEW FROM AN EDUCATION REPORTER

(Author's Note: Marc Salgado has served as education writer for the Palo Alto Times for seven years and has covered education for 13 years. During that time he has worked with 13 school districts in the South San Francisco Bay Area. Here he reports some of his experiences, and offers suggestions on how the media and educators can work together.)

When the secretary tells the school administrator there is a reporter on the line, I often sense the same reaction Nixon must have had when he was told, "Jaworski wants another tape." It's not that I see my role as making life uncomfortable for school officials, but it seems they often look upon me as an unwelcomed intruder hoping to put them in a bad light.

Fortunately, most of the educators I have run across have learned that reporters have great respect for Woodward and Bernstein, but neither the charter nor the opportunity to emulate their work. Our primary job is to accurately tell the public how the people they elect, employ or sent to school are doing.

So, dealing with the press should not be difficult. The best relationship is an open one, which takes getting to know one another. Every reporter has a list of people who are likely to be contacts in a school district or school. The administrator should have a similar list of media contacts. A school official usually has the advantage of knowing more about the reporters, having heard from others who have dealt with them or having seen their work.

One high school district I know of invited media representatives covering school affairs to meet with the deans of students, student leaders and top district officials. The goal was to learn deadlines, the kinds of information the media were interested in and to introduce to the press those who would be supplying routine information for publication. It also provided reporters with faces to go with the names and voices they most often saw and heard. That was a great start.

Many larger school districts have designated one administrator as "public information officer." Or they have created a classfied position for the same purpose, in the hope that the press will deal with that person. That often

works well when the public information officer is acquainted with the needs of the press and does not stand as an obstacle between the reporter and the source of news. Unfortunately, some districts often do not think it is necessary to give their public relations person access to the meetings where decisions are made or problems discussed. The result can be second-hand, or nearly useless information.

Newspapers generally prefer the "highest and best" source for their information. Under the best of circumstances, a story is second-hand, the reporter telling what someone else told him. Adding another layer between the news and the reader is seldom productive. And having a third party relay questions they can't answer to someone who can is sure to be about three times longer a process than necessary; it does nothing to dispel the image of an administrator who is above dealing with the press.

Veracity is a characteristic prized by newspeople. A red-faced "I don't know" is far better response than a misleading statement or a white lie. Given that administrators often have to protect superiors or subordinates, or think they do, a lie can ruin a relationship.

I recently asked a superintendent to confirm that some rather sensitive charges were made against a teacher or teachers unknown some years back. I assured him that I was not doing a story, but was merely trying to assess the accuracy of a report I had heard in connection with another story in another district. The superintendent had been in charge of personnel in those days, and I assumed he had heard them. He said he had not.

I later learned, to my satisfaction, that the charges, although specious, had been made. While I understand the superintendent's reluctance to acknowledge the unhappy incident, his response told me something about his candor. Straightforwardness would have cost him nothing. What is his manner to be when the subject is more immediate and closer to home? Is he likely to be any more candid?

Many times an administrator, for whatever reason, wants some information to get out, but does not want to be associated with it. After a lengthy conversation, the contact will suddenly mention that "This is all off the record." There is something about that phrase that is supposed to turn one into "a highly placed source." It doesn't work that way. When someone enters into a conversation with a person identified as a reporter, it is assumed that she is

talking for the record. To place the entire discussion off the record after the fact is unfair.

A decent reporter will accept off the record remarks only when the information is important to his story and he is fairly certain he would have less of a story without them. With issues short of Watergate, a story loses much of its credibility when it hinges on comments from unknown sources.

On occasion, believe it or not, a reporter will make a mistake. No one is more upset at that than he is, and he will be glad to correct the error. For some reason, people either chalk up the error to deliberate distortion or the risks one takes in talking to a reporter. But if the error is not pointed out, how can it be corrected?

I once did a feature on an administrator leaving one district I cover and going to another served by my paper. He was upset with my treatment of a sensitive subject in the story, and he carried that grudge for a long time. When we next had occasion to discuss the matter I explained why I had done the story that way, in terms of my perception of its news value. I may not have convinced him, but he was able to see the point from another perspective. The important thing is that we re-established communication, and he stopped ignoring my calls.

It probably comes down to the fact that both the reporter and the administrator have a job to do. The person with the information can make the job of the person seeking information more difficult. It's a matter of trust and understanding, on both sides. Joint respect will lead to joint cooperation.

PRACTICAL AIDS

THE WORLD'S SHORTEST COURSE IN EDUCATIONAL JOURNALISM

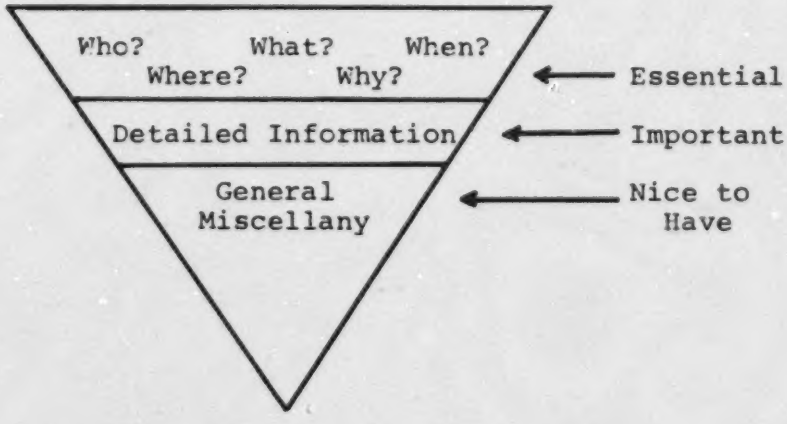
developed by

Gayle Wayne, Communications Consultant

Ocean View School District

1. Type your story on one side of the paper only, using 8 1/2 x 11" paper.
2. Double space.
3. Leave the top third of the first page blank, except for source information.
4. Source information should be at the top left corner of the first page and should include:
   a) The full name and address or your organization (school), the writer's name, a telephone number (night and day if necessary) where the writer can be reached.
5. End each page with a complete paragraph.
6. Make it short. If a second page is necessary, always indicate "MORE" at the bottom of the first page.
7. Use any of the following marks to indicate the end of the story: ### -30- XXX ***
8. Leave generous margins all around.
9. Consider the deadlines of the local press when planning and writing your story. Get the story in as far in advance as possible.
10. Send the news to your local reporter, by name.
11. Always use first and last names, and completely identify every person mentioned.
12. Go easy on the adjectives.
13. Use short words, short sentences, short paragraphs.
14. If you don't see your story in print when you expect it, ONE follow-up call to the reporter is acceptable. Find out why it didn't run. You may learn something that will help you next time.

When editors cut a story because of space limits, they begin at the bottom of your story. The following is an example of the order your story should follow:



If you have not the time, the energy, the desire or the skill to pull off your own news writing, the form on the next page is for you. It's better by far than no news at all. Type it and mail it as is to your local reporter as a "tip" sheet. If you fill it out well, it will be easy for him to write from. In the interest of upward and downward communication, send a copy of what you sent the press to your boss.

NEWS FROM _____ SCHOOL

Put Date Here
School or department submitting information
Contact Person, Title
Phone Number day ___ night ___
For release (date)

WHO (remember, first and last names) _____

_____

_____

WHAT _____

_____

_____

WHEN _____

_____

_____

WHERE _____

_____

_____

WHY OR HOW _____

_____

_____

OTHER _____

_____

_____

FOR MORE DETAILS CALL _____ AT _____

Room 4 Happy-Gram

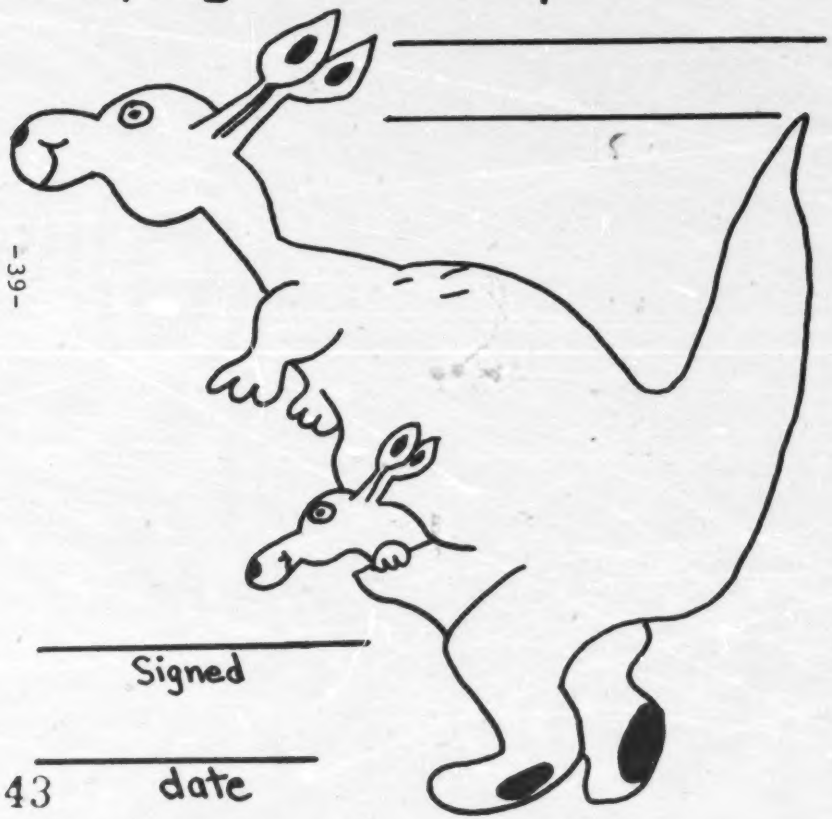
Dear Mr. & Mrs. _____

I am very proud of _____ today.

Sincerely,
Miss Falcone

For Giving A Friend A Lift

_____ has been caught helping a friend by _____



_____
Signed

_____
date

You Ain't Been Clowning Around

_____
date

_____
signed

20 IDEAS THAT WORK IN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

(Author's Note: Kenneth J. Gelms is Supervisor of Information at Beverly Hills Unified School District and 77-78 President of the National School Public Relations Association. This is reprinted from March, 1977, THRUST.)

Before jumping into ideas that work in school public relations, it's important to set the record straight concerning a few misconceptions.

There are as many definitions of school public relations as there are people doing the defining. However, the National School Public Relations Association defines it this way:

> "... a planned and systematic, two-way process of communication between an educational organization and its internal and external publics . . . to stimulate a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization."

The key words in that definition are "planned," systematic," "two-way," and "to stimulate a better understanding."

School public relations is not a whitewash of problems, since public confidence and support for resolving the problems come only when the public is kept informed. It is not a one-person operation, because every staff member is involved in daily contacts with innumerable publics and is having "public relations" whether he/she wants it or not. The only question is, "Is that relationship good or bad?" And school public relations is not just publicity, nor is it a panacea for all of education's ills.

With these thoughts in mind, then, what are some building-level public relations ideas that work with the various publics - students, staff, parents, general taxpayers, and others? Not all of the following ideas will work for everyone, nor would anyone necessarily implement all the ideas. However, these 20 ideas have proven useful to certain individuals, in certain situations, in certain locales. They represent a variety of starting points, from which people can shape their own programs to suit their personal needs.

1. Organize an in-service training program. This could take many forms. You might want to start with a "family meeting" of all school personnel - certified, classified, full-time, part-time, some-time, any-time. It's an opportunity for everyone to share his/her ideas and collectively seek solutions to problems affecting your school. Your first meeting could be devoted to "How can we improve our communication with our various publics?"

A useful booklet to help you answer this question - whether you attempt it on your own, with a few colleagues, or with the entire school staff - is The Banach-Barkelew Brainstorming Book (The Synergy Group, Inc., 46202, Sterritt, Utica, MI 48087, 1976, 38 pp., $2.95).

Other in-service sessions could be on parent conferences, how the teacher's/administrator's image is formed, PR tips for the classroom, pet peeves of parents, communicating with the home (letters, phone calls, and visits), human relations, group dynamics, the PR role of each specific category of employee, and hundreds of others.

Some outstanding staff development workshops on many phases of communication are conducted for individual schools and districts by the National School Public Relations Association, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209, (703) 528-5840. Workshops include improving building-level communication, how to reach students, communication techniques for the classroom teacher, communicating with parents, the school family (support staff), office personnel and their bosses, and working with advisory committees.

2. Publish a staff-oriented newsletter. Publish it on a regular basis. Keep it short - perhaps only one or two pages at most. Your staff should not have to learn about things "second hand." Let them know about district and school concerns. Share your thoughts on education. Don't forget to give a pat on the back to some certified and classified person in each issue. Demonstrate your leadership and ability to think.

3. Publish a parent-oriented newsletter. It too should be kept short and published regularly. Mail it home - definitely for grades above sixth grade, or it may just wind up on the grounds or on the school bus. (Your public relations with the custodian and the bus driver won't be too smooth.) "Your" newsletter is more than the "From the Principal's Desk" in the PTA's newsette. If you do the job properly, it will be among the best read materials, even by parents of high school students. It's your opportunity by tell the good things that are happening in your school.

But above all, tell it in layman's language. Ninety per cent of even college-trained parents have difficulty with such common educationese as "whole child," "scope and sequence," "affective domain," "component," and other choice jargon.

4. Consider advisory committees. You could form separate committees of students, parents, and teachers to study problems and make recommendations. Or you could at least place some students and parents on existing teacher/administrator committees.

5. Hold monthly informal "talk sessions." These could involve principal and staff, principal and students, principal and parents. Open a staff room and plan to drink lots of cokes and coffee. Share information. But do a great deal of listening to concerns, while building goodwill and feelings of unity.

6. Take the pulse of your school community. A survey need not be a $7,000 personal interview. There are many ways for obtaining feedback: advisory committees, key community communicators, switchboard queries and questions, talk sessions, letters to the editor, editorials, service club discussions, school-developed questionnaires, and many, many more.

7. Set up a "Welcome Wagon." Develop this concept and procedure for new parents, students, and teachers. You might consider using retired teachers, parents, and/or students as ambassadors.

8. Plan something special for new teachers. Do what you can to make them feel less "new." Set up a buddy system. Put up a bulletin board in the staff room with their pictures, names, and subject areas. Give them one of last year's annuals for a month or so. Spread orientation sessions throughout the year to give more time for the new teachers to assimilate the ideas. Cover all aspects of your program and all departments.

9. Develop school mini-tours. Invite special groups in for breakfast, coffee break time, or lunch. Update them on programs, solicit suggestions, and have them tour the school in small groups to see whatever they want to see. Include businessmen, senior citizens, non-parents, teachers from feeder schools, the various occupations such as doctors and attorneys, but also don't forget the bartenders, barbers, and beauticians for whom "talk" is part of their trade. Consider the ripple effect if you were to impress 10 people a month who then passed the impression on to 10 others who

also repeated the impression to 10 more people. You would have reached an adult community of 30,000 within three years.

10. Be visible to students and staff. Try talking with each staff member each day, even if it's just a warm "hello." Visit with students during lunch or on the athletic field. Eat lunch with a different group of staff members (including classified) each day.

11. Try a "suggestion box." Let it be known that suggestions are read. (You may have to write the first few suggestions yourself.) Announce what actions are planned based on the suggestions. When people know you will listen and do something, they generally will contribute. Have a thick enough skin, however, to weather the occasional "sick suggestion."

12. Set up an "in-the-news" bulletin board. Get the local papers, including the "throw-aways." (But don't ever call them that. They are "community weeklies.") Post all articles about your school and feeder schools, and include major district items. Teachers also need to know the "bad" as well as the "good" news. Post other laudatory materials and articles about individuals. Keep the bulletin board attractive and uncluttered. Change the news weekly. Give the old clipping to the person mentioned in the story. He/she will be grateful.

13. Set up something for senior citizens. Tours of school, lunch, special programs at their meeting place, and "Gold Card Passes" to school events are all useful ways to get them involved in "their" school.

14. Have students make presentations to the Board of Education. The list of possibilities is endless: art techniques, yearbook publishing procedure, forensics techniques, and many others, either in person (the best) or via a slide or film presentation.

15. Display student arts and crafts. Displays can be set up prominently in school, in the district office, and in the community. Banks, shopping malls, and individual stores usually are more than happy to cooperate. Don't forget to change the displays often and include all aspects of your program which result in some type of "product." The fine arts and industrial arts are naturals for displays.

16. Get more than "nothing" home. Encourage teachers in lower grades to summarize the day's work with the children just before they go home each day. This may modify some children's response of "nothing" when their parents ask, "What did you learn in school today?"

17. Be someone who follows through. Follow-up on problems. Resolve complaints. No matter how small or insignificant they may seem to you, they loom large in someone's eyes, otherwise they would not be problems or complaints. It's usually the little thing that eventually builds into the big thing.

18. Be enthusiastic. Very little else works better than enthusiasm. Turn all people on by showing you are genuinely interested in what they are doing. Treat them as you would like to be treated.

19. If you are fortunate enough to have a central Public Information Office, use its services. Ask for help on printed brochures, workshops, ways to reach your community, handling the news media.

20. Work at school public relations five minutes a day.

These 20 ideas are just starters. Any individual could add many more effective PR techniques to suit a particular situation. Note also that this list has nothing to do with writing a news release for the local newspaper.

But you don't have any time for all of this? Certainly you must have time for idea number 20. Couldn't you find five minutes a day somewhere? But what can anyone do in just five minutes?

In their Brainstorming Book, William Banach and Ann Barkelew suggest a five-minute-a-day PR system. It goes like this.

Pick a specific public relations activity and schedule it for next Monday at a specific time. If your activity takes five minutes or less, do it all Monday. If it takes longer, do it all Monday anyway, but give yourself time credit. In other words, it the activity took 15 minutes, you don't have to do anything on Tuesday and Wednesday. (If it took you 25 minutes, you're finished for the week.) Then start a new activity on Thursday or repeat the first one.

Remember, we all have daily relationships with a variety of publics. How good or bad are those relationships? It all depends upon how much time and effort we are willing to commit.

TIPS ON PUBLICATION LAYOUT

(Author's note: This material was prepared by Kenneth J. Gelms, Supervisor of Information, Beverly Hills Unified School District, and 1977-78 president of the National School Public Relations Association.)

Purpose:

The first step in producing any publication is one of the most important and one often overlooked. What's the objective of your publication? "To inform" is too general. Be specific. To recruit volunteers? To gain support for special education? Explain policy? Give recognition and develop morale? What action should the audience take?

Audience:

You've figured out what you're trying to say. Now figure out to whom you want to say it. Again, be specific. Certificated staff? Classified staff? Parents? Students? Non-parents? Analyze the specific audience you're aiming at. Everything you plan and write from here on must consider your specific purpose and audience. No publication can be all things to all people. You may need separate publications for different audiences.

Format:

Format is determined by purpose, audience, ability of the editor, time available and budget. Keep the newsletter short and simple. An 8 1/2 x 11" sheet, printed on one or two sides, is sufficient for a principal's newsletter to parents. Four pages is sufficient for a community newsletter from the central office. If you consistently have more than enough good material, publish more often rather than increase the number of pages, which decreases readability and increases costs. Make it attractive. Make it neat, well-organized, accurate and published regularly (not whenever there's enough new to print).

Writing:

KISS is the word to remember -- Keep It Simple, Stupid! Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs and action verbs. Avoid like the plague all educational gobbledygook, which most people use to impress rather than to communicate. Who really understands "cognitive and affective domains"? Many people think "interdisciplinary" means different methods of punishment. Use a punchy first paragraph ("lead") to whet readers' interest. Include in the lead -- who, what, when, where, why and how so the reader learns the gist of the story

even if he reads only the lead. Standardize your style.

Pick a typical reader. Write for that one specific reader and constantly keep in mind -- "What does he want to know?" rather than what you want to tell him. A story about a new course offering would be completely different in content, word choice, approach and length for students, parents, the superintendent, the board of education or an educational journal.

Art:

If you use photographs of clip art (drawings clipped out of a "clip book" for sale from such companies as Harry Volk's Studios, Pleasantville, N.J.), use good ones, both technically and ones that say something. Have action in photos. Come in close on the subject and cut out all material that is extraneous to the action. Use large photos. Warning: bad art and photos are worse than no art or photos at all.

Design:

KISS again! DON'T have fancy folds, indexed tabs, fancy borders, artwork just to break up copy without any logic, too many different type faces (one or two harmonious ones are enough), type that is too big or too small (36 pt - 1/2 inch is big enough and 9 pt pica type should be the smallest). DON'T overprint copy over photos or seals, run letters vertically, use color just because you "think now is the time for color" without any logic, make each page drastically different, go overboard on boxes and typographical ornaments, use too much bold face, italics or underlining (only for emphasis, and remember -- "All emphasis is no emphasis").

DO use a lot of white space (but keep it out of the center and put it to the outside of the design and in the corners), use serif type (letters with little "feet" on the strokes such as this type) for the message, use headlines on every story (headline type can be sans-serif--without feet), use caption on every photo (even if it's just an identification of a person in a head-and-shoulders photo).

Use the 30-3-30 principle. Have something for the 30-second reader (headlines that use a verb and say something); elements for the 3-minute reader ("say something" headlines, lead of the story, subheads within the story, captions that pull a major idea from the story and say something); and information for the 30-minute reader (the remainder of the publication, and remember, there are few 30-minute readers).

Special Spacing Tips for Typewritten Newsletters: Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch. Set lines of type not to exceed about 65 characters, including spaces between words. Single space the story itself and double space between paragraphs. Don't have paragraphs longer than eight lines. Double space between a headline and the story. Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story. Don't handletter headlines; use art transfer type available at good art supply stores. Use a pica typewriter, preferably with serif type. Don't use italics (except possibly for short captions) or script type.

Content:

Studies reveal that parents want to know (in this order) how their child is doing, what's taught and how, special services, policies (particularly as they pertain to their child), and how the money is spent (in 3rd grade, for example). Non-parents want to know about school policies, discipline, school costs and the curriculum. Staff members want their names, other names, coming events, past events, someone's ideas (theories, etc.). "Outsiders" want test results, what's important educationally, current trends in education, school finance.

Distribution:

Sending a publication home with the kids probably won't get there beyond fifth grade. Mail it. With a bulk mailing permit, it costs less than 2 cents per piece. Maintain an up-to-date mailing list. Include the power structure. Consider distribution to grocery stores, beauty and barber shops, medical offices.

Feedback and Evaluation:

How can you improve? Ask! Conduct an informal, face-to-face survey. Send out a simple questionnaire. Make random phone calls. Set up a cross-section advisory committee.

LAYOUT GUIDELINES

1. Study Other Publications -- Adapt, but do not copy, ideas and designs that appeal to you.

2. Develop Continuity -- Each page of additional information should follow logically from the preceding one. Each page should have a familiarity of design, but not necessarily an exact duplication.

3. Clear Photographs -- Be certain photographs and illustrations are interesting, clear and understandable at a glance. You can achieve this by following a few rules:

   a. Put some kind of action into your pictures; do not have people just standing there looking at the camera.

   b. Move in close so the subject fills 85 percent of the frame.

   c. Balance the objects in your photo as though they were on a teeter totter.

   d. Frame your picture at the top and sides if possible with trees, parts of buildings, equipment and other objects.

   e. Have all action moving into the picture, preferable from left to right. People should be looking into the picture, not out of it.

   f. Use large pictures.

   g. Do not put too many people into a picture. Never use more than five if you can help it. Two or three is much better.

4. Select Proper Type -- Do not use sans-serif or italics type for any large mass of reading material. They are difficult to read. Type smaller than 10 points becomes difficult to read. Select one type face for the content and the same or a different one for the titles. You seldon will ever need more than two different faces in a publication. Use bold and italics of the same type face for emphasis.

5. Use White Space or "Air" -- Be generous with your white space or "air". Do not fill in every square inch of space on a page. White space is desirable if it is balanced on your design teeter totter along with your other design elements.

6. Use Color -- But use it with taste -- as a background for some material you want to emphasize, possibly to be combined with black in a duo-tone picture, for titles, and in illustrations or graphs. Do not let it give the impression that you said to yourself, "Well, it's now time to use some color; so I'll throw some right here and here, and so on." Use it to emphasize, to separate, or to develop continuity. A good all-purpose, dignified color is a medium or slightly darker blue.

7. Colored Paper? -- If you cannot afford the use of colored ink, consider colored paper. It costs little more, if anything, than white paper.

8. Do not print words over a photograph. Usually you cannot see the photograph and you cannot read the words.

9. If you are doing the job and you are not a professional designer, keep the design simple.

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READING THROUGH THE FOG

One way some writers evaluate the readability of their material is using the Fog Index developed by Robert Gunning. It's a quick way to check parent bulletins, staff newsletters, etc.

To determine the Fog Index, take a 100 word sample of something you've written and follow these steps:

1. Find the average number of words per sentence in the sample. (If the final sentence in the sample runs beyond the 100th word, use more than 100 words to compute the average for this step.)

2. Count the number of words in the 100 word sample containing three syllables or more. (Do not count proper nouns or three syllable verb forms ending in -ed or -es.)

3. Add the average number of words per sentence to the number of words containing three or more syllables and multiply the sum by 0.4.

For example: A 100 word passage contains an average of 20 words per sentence and 10 words of three or more syllables. The sum of these two factors is 30 (20 plus 10). Multiplying 30 by 0.4 gives a Fog Index of 12. The index number refers to the years of schooling of a reader. Thus, the material in this passage would be appropriate for a high school graduate.

Evaluate the education level of your audience. Then, apply the Fog Index to see if your writing is appropriate for that audience.